Access, critical perspectives on communication, cultural & policy studies, 2015
Vol. X, No. X, 1–3, http://dx.doi.org/10.102901910191019

Cover page

Speaking of supervision: A dialogic approach to building higher degree research supervision capacity in the creative arts

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Acknowledgements
This work was supported by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching under Grant [LE12: 2264]. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Speaking of supervision: A dialogic approach to building higher degree research supervision capacity in the creative arts

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Abstract:
In the emergent field of creative practice higher degree research (HDR) programs, first generation supervisors have, by necessity, managed candidatures that are fundamentally different to their own–in terms of approach, form, process and outputs. They have developed new models of supervision for an unprecedented form of research that combines creative practice and written thesis. In a national research project, entitled Effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees, we set out to capture the insights, strategies, and approaches to supporting their PhD students of early supervisors and share them. Through the insights we gained in the early interview process we expanded our methods in line with a distributed leadership model and dialogic framework, and this led us to form conclusions and recommendations that we had not anticipated.

In this paper we draw on Bakhtin's dialogics to explain how giving precedence to the voices of supervisors not only facilitated the articulation of their dispersed tacit knowledge, it also led to other discoveries including the nature of resistance to prescribed models, policies and central academic development; the importance of polyvocality and responsive dialogue in enabling continued innovation in the field; and the benefits of reflecting, discussing and sharing practices with colleagues through dialogue as an effective form of academic development and research education leadership capacity building.

Keywords: supervision, creative practice research, practice-led, academic development, distributed leadership, HDR, PhD, postgraduate

Introduction

In a recent research project entitled *Effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees* (funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) in 2013), we set out to investigate the nature and practices of supervising Higher Degrees by Research (HDRs) in the creative arts. Unlike 'traditional' fields, creative practice PhDs in the visual and performing arts, design, creative writing, and media involve research in and through the production of creative 'artefacts' (art, products or events) in conjunction with a written thesis (often referred to as an 'exegesis').[i] This difference in form means that the research questions, aims, methodologies, and new knowledge claims of creative practice PhDs differ from those of traditional PhDs (Scrivener, 2000; Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2009). In turn, this means that the supervision of candidates in creative fields is quite unlike established models and practices. However, little research has so far been conducted into what effective supervision in this distinctive field entails.

In 2009 a large-scale Australian research project entitled *Creative Arts PhD: Future-proofing the creative arts in higher education* (Baker and Buckley, 2009) recognised the diverse

practices across institutions and across creative arts disciplines in relation to what constitutes the creative practice PhD, how it is examined, and how it is supervised. Its final report included a number of recommendations relating to standards and consistency, as well as the recommendation that,

> Further examination of patterns of supervision could assist in establishing some best practice models to assist in creative-arts-specific research supervision training programs (97).

This recommendation provided a key impetus for our project. Although the field of creative practice HDRs is relatively new (largely gaining traction since the Strand report in 1998), we proceeded from the premise that many first generation supervisors have now begun to consolidate their practices, and proposed that it might therefore be possible to capture insights into what constitutes effective supervision practices in creative fields, and establish how they might be fostered.

Our project, which was conducted as a partnership between Queensland University of Technology, Auckland University of Technology, University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, and University of Western Sydney, unfolded in 2013 to 2014. The findings were presented in a comprehensive, 75 page report entitled *Building distributed leadership for effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees* (Hamilton, Carson and Ellison, 2014), with resources disseminated through the website *Effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees*, and as a booklet for supervisors entitled *12 Principles for Effective Supervision of Creative Practice Higher Research Degrees* (Hamilton, Carson and Ellison, 2013).

We do not intend to duplicate our research findings or outcomes here, for they can be accessed directly through these publications. Instead, the focus of this article is on our *approach* to the research, and the ways in which it influenced our findings and recommendations as well as the presentation of the outcomes of the research. In 'A Complex Terrain: Putting Theory and Practice to Work as a Generative Praxis' Elizabeth Grierson writes,

> The *making new* is a foreign terrain of discovery ... There is always the potential for entering new discourses and opening knowledge to the "more". (Grierson in Peters et al., 2012: 68)

This is broadly true of the journey of research. The nature of research into a new field is, self evidently, an exploration of the unknown, and its outcomes cannot be fully anticipated in advance. By engaging with new discourses, the research process can take divergent paths and reach unexpected conclusions. In our project, it was not simply the emergent discourses of adjoining fields of supervision that would cause us to change course and lead us to discover "more", but the tensions we encountered between dominant discourses of supervision and the experiences of supervisors.

As our project progressed, our methods would become multimodal, distributed, participatory and dialogic. This led to insights, outcomes and recommendations that might otherwise have eluded us. Opening up our research to the voices of supervisors, we would discover more than we anticipated and this would lead us to make recommendations on new ways to approach research supervision training. We would also rethink our approach to the presentation of our research. Instead of synthesising our findings into authoritative statements or standards and best practice model, it would come to take the form of polyvocal dialogues.

A distributed approach to capturing diverse perspectives and situated knowledges

When we first embarking on research into the effective supervision of creative practice HDRs in 2012, our aims were aligned with the recent recommendations of Baker & Buckley's *Creative Arts PhD* (2009). Based on a comprehensive overview of the emergent field of creative arts research, this project had reported diverse practices, processes and outcomes of creative practice PhDs, and so called for sector-wide standards and an exemplary 'model' of supervision for the creative arts. By capturing the early experiences of administrators and course leaders, and eliciting the strategies and good practices of 'early adopter' supervisors, we planned to develop such an "in-common" understanding of supervisory practices. This, we assumed, would unfold as a conventional research process: situating ourselves, as researchers, at the center of a data collection process, we would draw together data collected through the methods of document audits, surveys and interviews; filter this primary data through an interpretive analysis into a definitive overview of the field; produce a coherent 'model' and set of 'standards'; then disseminate our conclusions to a receptive audience through summative publications.

However, our preliminary research confirmed our own experiences as supervisors and administrators of creative practice HDRs. It highlighted the unevenness of supervisory practices and processes across the sector, the contestation of the field of creative practice research, and tensions between local and central administration. We recognised the need to take a more open approach to capturing diverse perspectives. Involving five partner institutions (including 'Sandstone', 'Technology', 'Regional' and 'Trans-Tasman' Universities) in a research partnership, we set out to draw together insights from their varied contexts, and from a range of institutional levels–from top-level policy documents to research student centre administrators and course leaders, to experienced, as well as new, supervisors.

Our initial approach to the research was therefore not strictly centrifugal but somewhat distributed. Indeed, the project proposal we submitted for funding the research cited the principle of distributed leadership. Adapted from other contexts, distributed leadership has been applied to research in higher education in recent years (Jones, S. 2011). It recognises that leadership and expertise are not simply invested in formally designated leadership roles but, as an attribute and capacity, are possessed by individuals at all levels of an institution who act as local innovators, exemplary role models, and sources of information and good practice to others (MacBeath, 2005).

At this point, our implementation of distributed leadership principles was narrowly defined. That is, we were mindful of capturing and representing the diverse perspectives of 'leaders' at different levels in a range of university contexts. We took a consultative and collaborative approach to data collection through the network of project team members. Each belongs to the first generation of creative practice HDR supervisors and are recognised nationally, as well as locally within their institutions, as leaders in the field. Together, we proceeded to cast a wide net to draw together a diverse range of 'informants' for our study.

Donna Haraway [1991] has written about the importance of recognising a subject's 'situated knowledges'. From a feminist perspective, she argues that 'texts' are inevitably inflected by an author's subjectivity, which is predicated upon their lived experiences and their habitation of gender and sexuality. Situated knowledges, she writes, leads to "wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds". From a different perspective, Bakhtin [1981] argues that a 'text' or 'speech' is necessarily inflected by the author's point of view or 'accented

social orientation', which is contingent upon class and political position. In the case of our research, we expected respondents' 'oriented subject positions', and hence their spoken and written responses to our questions, to be influenced by a range of factors including their position within their university (administration, academic leadership, supervisor); the agendas through which their position functions (strategic, operational, pedagogic); and the types of discourses they most frequently encounter (policy documents, theoretical papers, practitioner statements, academic conversations, student voices).

That is, we were mindful of collecting diverse insights and were aware that the professional situation and perspective of each informant would be inflected by their institutional location, disciplinary base, qualifications, experience, and professional responsibilities, along with the attendant discourses and conversations that surround them. We recognised that each respondent to our surveys and interviews would therefore possess a multifaceted subject position, have particular objectives, be responsive to a range of preceding and concurrent discourses, and inhabit particular speech genres. This was not something that we saw as problematic. As Bakhtin argues, the recognition of authorial partiality enables us to accept–even to embrace–the speaker's individual and unique orientation to their subject.

Our document audit revealed that the participating universities' have varied clusters of creative disciplines, diverse HDR cultures and practices (admission processes, naming and timing of milestones, proportion of theory to practice, guidelines for submission and presentation of outcomes (written and practical), and examination requirements). It also confirmed Baker and Buckley's (2009) findings of inconsistent nomenclature for creative practice/practice-led/practice-based/artistic research and the written component/thesis/exegesis. And it revealed diverse HDR cohorts–from primarily high performing honours graduates to primarily mature practitioners and industry professionals.

We approached administrators and course leaders across the partner universities through surveys, and interviewed both experienced and new supervisors. In this way our data collection not only had breadth but depth, as it drilled down through several strata of HDR culture. Moreover, our interview sample brought insights from supervisors across diverse creative disciplines–from visual art, music, performing art, new media, creative writing, fashion, graphic design, interaction design and interior design. In terms of experience, the longevity of supervision ranged from six months to 20 years. The sample included seven 'first generation' supervisors (who have been advocates for the field, have helped to define it through their scholarly publications on creative practice research, and were among the first to supervise creative practice PhDs); seven 'experienced' supervisors (with three or more completions of creative practice HDRs and an average ten years experience); and eleven 'new' or 'second generation' supervisors (who have recently completed their own creative practice PhDs). Expertise, qualifications and backgrounds of the interviewees also varied. While the majority of interviewees (21/25) have a PhD (two were undertaking a PhD, and two were accredited through 'equivalent standing'), the type of PhD varied, with the majority (twelve) holding a 'conventional' PhD and nine a creative practice PhD. (It should be noted that, of those with a conventional PhD, three quarters considered themselves to be hybrid theorist-practitioners but undertook their PhD before creative practice HDRs were possible.[ii]) Our surveys and interviews with supervisors were semi-structured, with open-ended questions to enable multi-dimensional perspectives to arise in an open and expansive way.[iii]

Through the 'insider' knowledge of the project team members embedded within each of the partner universities, we were able to tap into established networks and recruit this diverse

cross-section of 'informants' very early in the project timeline. We began disseminated our survey and commenced the interviews with supervisors in November 2012. Questions ranged across topics of the supervisor's background and experience; views on creative practice as a HDR field; training; acquisition of expertise and support for the role; and practices, strategies and innovation.

Our data collection was therefore inclusive of diverse perspectives from the outset, with participants from multiple institutions and multiple levels of university strata, from across a range of disciplines and backgrounds and with varied levels of expertise. In all of this diversity we might say that the sample provided a representative snapshot of the sector. It was therefore our hope that a synthesis would lead to standards and a model that was broadly representative and so relevant to diverse contexts.

Dialogue, responsiveness, centrifugal and centripetal discourses

Because our questions were wide-ranging, open-ended and expansive however, we left ourselves open to insights that were new, unexpected and surprising. Early on in the interview process, we were struck by a number of observations that would change our approach to the research.

First, it became clear that supervisors in creative fields have not only assumed a level of risk involved in a new, undefined area of pedagogical practice, they have been, and continue to be, highly agile. Of our interviewees, not only have the majority supervised a form of PhD that is very different to the one they completed themselves, a high proportion (72% or 18/25 (11/14 experienced supervisors and 7/11 new supervisors)) have extended their supervision capacity beyond their immediate area of expertise and discipline area. In addition, irrespective of their qualifications, the form of their own PhD, or their identification as a theorist (five), practitioner (five), or hybrid theorist-practitioner (fifteen), all supervise across both creative and written aspects, with the exception of one.[iv] This flexibility in specialist expertise is unusual in postgraduate supervision, and sets the field apart from more established areas, where supervisors tend to attract candidates and take on projects that are very closely aligned with their own specializations and form of PhD.

This flexibility has, of course, been a pragmatic necessity in forging a new field. As one supervisor noted, "I was only one of a few people in the [discipline] who had actually supervised to completion [when I arrived]. And so … if anyone wanted to do a PhD, I was supervising." However, instead of being daunted by the challenges that a new form of research pedagogy presents, the supervisors we interviewed have embraced risk and diversity. They saw both as an opportunity to enhance their own knowledge and understanding (whether practitioners or theorists); as well as to strengthen and invigorate their discipline's postgraduate (as well as undergraduate) course offerings. Importantly, they also saw it as integral to the potential for innovation in creative research. As one supervisor noted, "It is exciting to be part of such a rich area and it is gratifying to be part of a process of change." Indeed, some respondents argued that creative PhDs are about all challenging orthodoxies. As one respondent commented:

> I like to think that at PhD level the practitioner is innovating or renovating the question of what the field is. They're bringing something that's fundamentally questioning to the field.

Supervisors of creative practice research candidates have similarly been presented with the opportunity to challenge orthodoxies as they bring together teaching, research and creative practice into a new field that challenges the conventions of higher degrees by research more

broadly. They consider the opportunity for continued experimentation and diversity to be absolutely fundamental to the momentum of both innovation in creative arts research and institutional approaches to research degrees.

Eva Bendix Petersen (2007) argues that academics are continually involved in maintaining, negotiating and challenging the boundaries around academic categories because of the dynamic nature of this work. Indeed, in our interviews there was a recurring theme of supervisors adopting 'guerrilla tactics'. This discourse of resistance was reported in Nigel Krauth's 2011 examination of doctoral studies in the field of creative writing, in which he refers to the exegesis as a 'runaway text':

> After paralleling and plaiting, came a sense of the exegesis as outlaw. I think important room should be made for the outlaw exegesis because new knowledge won't be made by those who obey, or stretch just a little, the laws or status quo. With the understanding that PhDs are entitled to break new ground in exegetical and artefact areas and must challenge existent forms, I have continued experiments with willing candidates and with the adjudication of mostly-understanding examiners.

The supervisors we interviewed cannot be characterised as mavericks however. They overwhelmingly welcome the opportunity to engage with a diverse, cross-disciplinary higher degree research community and the perspectives of traditional, as well as new fields–within their institution and beyond it. As they navigate uncharted territories, they are curious, experimental and expansive in their approach, but they value the emerging research into the field and the clarity it brings; with almost all of the supervisors we spoke with (80%) being familiar with the developing literature on creative practice research. Indeed, eleven of the twenty-five respondents have actively contributed to the literature. That is, we found a measured, scholarly approach, attentive to the discourses of others, and a sense of active co-production of the field.

Indeed, in the face of diverse supervisions and the individual needs of candidates, a number of supervisors we spoke to have come to focus on the core attributes of research design as an anchor to their supervisions. As one, reported, "It's about how to go through, and what's required [in terms of scholarship]–not always about being an expert in the precise field." Another (new) supervisor, noted that, "I have a sense of how to do a PhD, and I see the work of the creative and match it in standard." That is, they did not see innovation in research higher degrees as challenging the core attributes of research as the production of new knowledge through rigorous methodologies and scholarly articulation of the resulting extension of its field. Contestation is around what form all this might take.

This framing is important for contextualising the strong resistance we encountered to the potential imposition of prescribed models and 'standards' relating to methodologies, forms of creative practice research, and what constitutes new knowledge. An overwhelming proportion of supervisors in our sample insisted that these aspects of creative practice must remain open to experimentation. As an experienced supervisor argued,

> They must remain flexible because the learning mode is discovery based. I think this is the flaw when people try to systematise models for creative practice PhDs. They don't understand the fundamental premise that it is discovery based.

We would hear this sentiment expressed over and over again in relations to the imposition of policy and oversight.

In particular, supervisors were anxious about the imposition of standards and models by central research student centers, which they encountered as a subtext in central supervisor training and resources. All of the institutions in our study offer central academic development for supervisors (being compulsory for registration in some), and the majority of supervisors interviewed (19/25 or 80%) have undertaken it.[v] While this central training is well developed, and most supervisors we spoke to recognise its value for understanding 'process', they are largely resistant, or at best are ambivalent to it, describing it as functional, institutionally imposed, generic, and ill aligned to creative HDRs.

Belying a broad perception that the goal of such training is to impose central generic standards, there was much discussion about the unique aspects of creative practice research, and the need for programs that are specifically targeted to issues that supervisors encounter in this context. As one respondent proposed,

> It would be great if there were opportunities available to supervisors that focus on creative practice in particular. The university does not have the expertise in many ways to offer this [support]. However, we do have a few very good higher-level academics in our faculties.

That is, supervisors were not expressing an aversion to continued professional learning per se, but to central, generic, and didactic models.

On the other hand, academic development, in the form of workshops, case studies, and mentoring, is more welcome. Working within a 'small' community to undertake academic development that includes opportunities to hear and voice local practices and discuss in-common issues is preferred by the majority of supervisors we interviewed. While none of the partner institutions in our study currently offers systematic and regular discipline or faculty-specific supervision training, many new supervisors in particular would appreciate such opportunities to learn from experienced peers.

This resistance to recent system change in Australian higher education sector in the form of policy guidelines and standards, supervisor accreditation, and centrally delivered supervisor training is not unique to creative practice supervision. As we commenced our literature review, we found that recent qualitative research in IT disciplines (Bruce and Stoodly 2013) and other disciplinary fields (Hammond et al. 2010) reported similar findings. Hammond et al. for instance suggest that tying academic development to quality assurance and compliance is problematic. They write, "there is considerable resistance from supervisors to compulsory, centralised and formal training programs. There is also considerable cynicism about the value of such programs" (2010, 15).

We can draw upon philosophical perspectives on dialogue to help explain the tensions we encountered. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin not only describes the inflected nature of dialogue, and the accented social orientation of the speaker, he also explains the responsive nature of their 'utterances', writing,

> Every utterance must be regarded as primarily a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere. Each utterance refutes affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account... Therefore, each kind of utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication.

In this way, Bakhtin argues that discourses are a site of contestation and in a state of flux. Responsive speakers present purposeful, responsive utterances to existing discourses. And it

is the dialogic clash of accented social orientations that exert a constant push and pull upon meaning. It is this push and pull on the meaning (of creative practice, of research and of HDR supervision) that respondents our study wish to retain, so that it the field might remain open to experimentation.

Bakhtin goes on to describe the inherent tension between 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' discourses, as the site of contestation. Centripetal discourses are official and formal, and their purpose is centralising, homogenising and hierarchizing. 'Centrifugal' discourses, on the other hand, are decentralising and destabilising of conformity and formality. These counter forces, he argues, are constantly at play in communicative interactions (1981, p. 425). Responsive utterances are not simply a dialogic clash of accented social orientations and voices then, but a contest between the center and the margins, between authority and innovation, and between 'ideals' and lived experience.

In this we might recognize the tensions between university centers, which are interpreting and implementing national policy documents (for example the Australian Qualifications Framework, Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency documents), and the responses of supervisors on the ground. It is a tension between quality assurance and compliance to 'standards' and 'models' of supervision, and the need to recognize complexity, differentiation and emergence. It is not just a dialogic clash of accented social orientations, perspectives and voices, but a fundamental tension between the urge to reign in, to standardize, and to govern through oversight and regulation and the contesting voices of advocates for diverse practices, and an expansive space for risk, experimentation and innovation.

A chance to talk: The best academic development is talking things through

The second, and most striking aspect of the interviews we conducted was a frequently-stated desire by supervisors to engage in conversations with others about their experiences, new discoveries, insights and practices. Opinions that were frequently voiced, such as, "we don't get the chance to talk" and "a supervisor's role is such a cloaked affair compared to other contexts", suggest that this opportunity is rarely afforded. [vi] That is, while supervisors are very conscious of the powerful centralizing voices that are amplified through university corridors and formal communications, they felt that they have few institutionally sanctioned avenues to give voice to their own, often hard won, tacit knowledge.

Our interviews clearly afforded this opportunity. As interviewers and project leaders, we are also experienced supervisors of creative practice HDRs and made this situated perspective clear at the beginning of each interview. Our approach to the interviews might therefore be described as a qualitative and relativist research method, in which we assumed the dual identity of practitioner-researcher. [vii] This meant that the interviews, while rigorously developed and implemented through Ethical Clearance, consistent question forms, independent initial analysis and so on, took the form of colleague-to-colleague dialogues, which proceeded from a common ground. The interviews afforded a pretext in which supervisors could voice their invested, tacit knowledge on a range of topics.

In many cases, this had never been voiced before. The interview process therefore often created powerful reactions in the interviewees. A palpable shift in posture, in gesture and voice was discernable and in response to the open-ended final question "Would you like to

add any further comment", the interviewees often took the opportunity to comment on the positive impact the interview had on their self-perception and on deepening of their own insights. This was more than an appreciation of the opportunity to simply talk about their practices in the interviews, or the ego boost that is afforded by conferring the status of 'expert' on an interview subject. Speaking about their insights aloud for the first time, many interviewees realized just how much knowledge they had gained about supervision. It afforded the opportunity for deep reflection, and the concrete articulation of their tacit knowledge brought it to the surface and into the open. As one participant relayed at the end of his interview, it was a most powerful form of academic development for him. Then, reflecting on his own statement, he concluded that, "The best academic development is talking things through."

For those supervisors who have gained a reputation as local innovators and leaders, there are some opportunities to share their knowledge as their advice and insights are sought out by peers. Indeed, our analysis of interview responses found that, for new supervisors in particular, the term 'leadership' tends to be associated with 'experienced supervisors' or 'disciplinary experts', rather than to managers or administrators of HDR programs. While such leadership is often informal and unstructured, supervisors–particularly new supervisors–frequently referred to its value. Instead of engaging directly with a chain of 'command' and institutional process when issues arise, a local network of 'advising' is first sought out. Indeed, many interviewees spoke readily of the informal networks that operate in relation to discussions around supervision, which suggests that a form of distributed leadership has arisen, in which innovators and experienced practitioners advise and support their colleagues within informal local networks.

Indeed, while most supervisors said there was no 'consensus' on creative practice supervision, many supervisors report adopting the effective approaches of experienced supervisors. And a number have developed mentor relationship. Some of the universities in our study have developed a mentoring system that pairs experienced supervisors with emerging ones, while some supervisors at other universities have form informal mentoring relationships.[viii] The mentees overwhelming recommend it as an opportunity to learn. Co-supervision also affords a type of 'apprenticeship' for an Associate Supervisor before the take on their own principal supervision. As Sinclair (2004) notes, experience in supervision is a key indicator of likely success in student progression and completion (borne out by data collected from schools in our study). This suggests that experience is of benefit to supervisors/supervisions/candidates and it therefore follows that the insights gained by experienced supervisors may be of particular value to new supervisors in the form of mentoring, providing exemplars of good practice, and academic development. Indeed our study found that it appears to be highly valued by new supervisors. As one comments:

> [mentoring] is the strongest aspect of the program, I have had really good mentorship as a supervisor [in both] supervisor arrangements [and] leadership of the program. It is a strength of the school.

We found that the mentors in our study tend to use personal exemplars of (successful) creative practice PhDs to assist this process. As one explained,

> I use examples of exegeses, as they are tangible evidence when used in conjunction with the story. Back-story is important; [it might be] an example of risk taking, but it needs to be based on deep working knowledge and lived experience with the context [of the student].

This conversational approach, which employs authentic, contextually specific examples to make supervision practices, insights and strategies explicit, was often cited as the preferred model of learning by new supervisors who are, in Petersen's terms in the process of 'identity formation' and developing 'self-governance' (2007). Such dialogues enable new supervisors to adopt the "unremarkable" academic practices of experienced peers, even though they may not be directly named in such examples.

Indeed, an overwhelming majority of experienced as well as new supervisors in our study expressed interest in the idea of using "real" exemplars as case studies. This includes those drawn from 'outside' their own institution. Such exemplars of good practices, they pointed out, should not be cast as models or standardized template, but as a field of possibilities, which might be adapted to suit the supervisor's own context and situation.

In short, because supervising in a relatively new field is a relatively isolated and unparalleled experience, there was an often-stated desire to engage in conversations with others and to gain insights into the exemplary practices and strategies of others working in a similar context (however that might be defined). As one supervisor noted, 'The best academic development is talking things through …there's a sense of peer sharing that works for me–a multiplicity of voices, keeping things open rather than closed.'

As Bakhtin expands in *The Dialogic imagination*, "It is through dialogic interactions that language is used and developed; and it is through dialogic interactions that the world is created and experienced with each person engaging in the ever flowing current of life imbued with and propelled by other voices, other texts, other ways of being and doing" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 346). Through dialogue, we can not only gain insights into other ways of 'doing supervision', and of 'being a supervisor' but, as supervisors within an emergent field, we can begin to develop a common language and shared understanding of what the field is, its practices, its language and definitions, and its impact.

Out of our initial interviews with supervisors, we therefore began to form an understanding that enabling dialogue is of benefit to experienced supervisors to be afforded the opportunity to reflect upon, articulate and thereby consolidate the understanding they have gained, and is of benefit to new supervisors as a way to gain insight into the wealth of institutional, operational and tacit knowledge of their more experienced peers, but also in the process of identity formation as supervisors, and in developing good practices of supervision. Moreover, a dialogic framework works more deeply in relation to an emergent field. It affords the initiation of a deepened understanding, a shared language, and the dissemination of exemplary practices, yet it enables the field to remain fluid and emergent–open to the addition of new experiences, to contestation, and to unending responsiveness.

In our research report, we would therefore go on to highlight the importance of local relationships and networks and argue that actively fostering distributed leadership is pivotal to building research education leadership and postgraduate supervision capacity. We would make recommendations to universities for local, discipline based academic development for supervisors in the form of supervisor dialogues and collegial mentoring to complement generic, central training. We would also recommend that disciplines and faculties recognize the 'informal' leadership that has emerged, and harness it to stage local, discipline level workshops on supervisory practices and processes, to facilitate peer-to peer dialogues, and to

capture authentic, contextually relevant exemplars of good practice. And, in the in our booklet for supervisors we published out of the research project, we would recommend to supervisors that they reflect, discuss and share practices with colleagues though sustained dialogues.

In focusing on the importance of decentralized (local) contextually specific academic development we are not alone. Hammond et al. (2010) recommended that universities review resources and professional development programs for supervisors to ensure they respond to local needs, as well as those of new and experienced supervisors. They also recommended that universities foster and sustain local conversations about research education, adopt personalised approaches to supervisor training, and develop leadership in research education at local levels. And, like us, in research on supervision in IT disciplines, Bruce (2009) notes the powerful impact of the conversations she had with supervisors (in the form of focus groups), which leads her to recommend peer mentoring.

Enabling distributed leadership through a dialogic framework

While we would go on to recommend a dialogic framework for supervisor academic development as an outcome of our research, we also realized that our recommendations must be mirrored within our research. While our core aim–to capture the isolated and scattered insights of supervisors in the emergent field of creative practice HDRs, so that they might be collated and shared for the benefit of new and less experienced supervisors–did not change, our objectives did. We broadened the research methods into a dialogic framework, and set about facilitating greater opportunities for supervisors and administrators to articulate and make concrete their tacit knowledge. Moreover, we realised that it was import to not just draw together supervisor dialogues as a one way 'data capture' process, but to engender dialogue between supervisors; enabling them to meet and present, share and see what has been learnt, to debate issues from their diverse perspectives, and to bring their ways of 'doing supervision' into an open conversation. In this way, supervisors would not only be afforded a voice, we could progress the discursive push and pull upon the meaning of supervising creative practice research, and advance the maturation of the field.

We initiated a national symposium, *Effective Supervision of Creative Arts Research Degrees*, six months into the project. Our goal was not to present our research findings to an audience, as is the usual motivation for a conference conducted within a research project. Indeed, the research was in its initial phases and, as yet, we had no findings to report. Instead we set out to open up an opportunity for reflective dialogue and exchange. We invited project team members and the interviewees, and also sent invitations to all Australasian and New Zealand Universities. And we issued an open call for good practice case studies and position papers. In this way, the project design expanded to include 62 delegates from twenty universities. They were involved in multimodal dialogues in the form of formal papers, case studies and open forums on specific topics, such and supervising the writing and supervising the practice. In relation to our research project, the symposium multiplied the outcomes of our research project. Alongside the audit, survey and interview materials we originally set out to collect, it enable us to capture the exemplary case studies presented at the symposium and disseminate them on the project's web site. It was also an avenue for disseminating our very early findings, and provided an opportunity for feedback and early evaluation of the project as it was unfolding.

But more than this, the symposium enabled responsive dialogue, and information and resource sharing amongst delegates. We would see writ large the benefits of actively fostering distributed leadership, enabling supervisor relationships and networks, facilitating reflection and supervisor dialogues, sharing practices, and capturing authentic, contextually relevant exemplars of good practice. The symposium enabled participants to both voice their ideas and gain feedback. As one wrote,

> How wonderful it is to talk to people about supervision, to test ideas, get a feel for the lie of the land, ask for advice–knowing there's a potential community out there.

And it produced a dialogic form of academic development. As another respondent to our symposium feedback questionnaire noted,

> This symposium has revealed that there are many people concerned about similar issues and there is plenty to learn from one another.

That is the symposium provided an opportunity for academic development in the form of dialogic exchange, which was of benefit to both new and experienced supervisors. However, it was also of benefit to the field more broadly, for it enabled delegates to collectively seek common ground. As another commented,

> [There was] sense that we are all in the same boat as supervisors; that we care about our practice and the shaping of the practice-led space within academia.

Attendees also anticipated becoming as a point of dissemination, taking back what they had discovered and establishing local networks within their own universities. As one wrote,

> [The symposium] furthered my knowledge about the different approaches taken by PhD supervisors and the challenges faced when supervising these kinds of research projects. This has assisted me as a PG supervisor and I will share the information with my creative arts colleagues at [my] university.

In this we enabled the extension of the process of distributed leadership, and prompted the initiation of new networks, both between delegates, and as local communities of practice.

Many of the attendees would go on to produce scholarly outcomes (including by responding to our calls for submissions to this special issue). Through a reflective and dialogic process that began with the tentative voicing of tacit knowledge in interviews, the insights of supervisors had been teased out, made confident, and amplified through a dialogic framework. They had been set side by side, tested, contested and realized–all through the process of dialogue.

Changed outcomes

Besides our approach to the methods of research, we also changed the way in which the outcomes of the research data were presented. Instead of distilling our research findings as primary data from the document audit, surveys and interviews, into a definitive overview of the field and producing a coherent 'model' and set of 'standards' for supervision, we instead identified the primary concerns, attitudes, and practices of early adopter supervisors. Through a content analysis we synthesised them into recurrent themes, good practices and strategies of supervision and produced a set of working principles.

These principles were presented in a booklet entitled *12 Principles for Effective Supervision of Creative Practice Higher Research Degrees* (2013) as advice from supervisors to supervisors. Each principle is voiced in the words of supervisors and, while we summarize each thematic principle in terms of overview narrative, it is illustrated by quotes and exemplars of good practices in supervisors' voices. These dialogues sit adjacent to each other,

highlighting comparative and diverse experiences and voices. In some instances they are coupled in dialogic contestation, highlighting the contextual differentiation and situated knowledges of the speakers (as new and experienced supervisors for example). Importantly, the principles are not presented as rules, guidelines, or models but as a form of supervisor-to-supervisor advice, as a form of mentoring. They are framed as possibilities and exemplars of good practice that might be adapted to suit the supervisor's own context and situation.

The outcome of out research (besides a formally structured report in line with funding guidelines) might therefore be described as a polyvocal text, or heteroglossia. In an interpretation of Dostoyevsky's novels [1981 trans.], Bakhtin describes a heteroglossia as a hybrid construction of the utterances of the narrator and a cast of characters. The Russian term 'raznorechie', translated into the English heteroglossia, literally means 'different-speech-ness'. More than a textual device for arranging multiple voices into an advancing narrative, a heteroglossia involves the integration of subject positions, accented social orientations, and voices–with all the tension that this juxtaposition implies. Bakhtin contends that purposefully combining harmonised and discordant discourses produces dialogic counterpoints in a text, which shapes discursive meaning. But it also gives rise to a push and pull upon meaning, and hence it challenged coherent, centralised and 'official' discourses. As Bakhtin argues, meaning is never fully realized, closed once and for all, but remains open through 'responsive utterances' that negotiate and advance it as a continual clash and clash of centrifugal and centripetal forces. In the case of our research project speaks to a drive towards coherent 'standards' and a resistance and contestation by supervisors in the form of other voices, other texts, and other ways of being and doing.

Conclusion:

Our interviews revealed that supervisors hold innovation and experimentation at higher value than systems, standards or prescriptive models; that they hold relationships with candidates, peers and local networks in higher regard than institutional 'management' and 'compliance'; and that they value dialogic approaches such as mentoring, sharing authentic exemplars, and supervisor-to-supervisor dialogues in higher regard as academic development than generic, didactic training and resources. What became most clear was that experienced, as well as new supervisors, benefit from the process of voicing their insights, and that there is great value to supervisors of all experience levels engaging in reflective practice and articulating the processes and practices of supervision, expressing concerns, and sharing experiences and strategies for success.

These early findings caused us to changed tack partway through our research process and, far from producing a model or standard for the effective supervision of creative practice PhDs, we facilitated an open, dialogic framework in which supervisors could share their insights and to co-produced a deeper understanding of the field. And we produced a dialogic, polyvocal text that was open rather than closed.

Most importantly, we realized that it is the *process* of dialogic engagement, as much as the concrete *outcomes* of the process, that provides a means through which supervisors can be supported and equipped, and supervisory capacity can be built. In this, our understanding of distributed leadership expanded beyond simply being the recognition of the expertise of leaders at all strata of the institution. Distributed leadership provides an opportunity to enable

a broad-based and networked system, with innovators and early adopters sharing a wealth of tacit knowledge, and providing models, advice, and support to others within communities of practice which operate most effectively when people believe they have a contribution to make and have the capacity to take initiative.

Local leadership by 'early innovator' supervisors has been imperative to establishing this new field of creative practice research supervision, and integral to building supervision capacity. Dialogues between 'local' supervisors must now be a crucial component of professional development and building research education leadership. If not necessarily evident to other 'tiers' of leadership, the advice, mentoring and sharing of good practices that experienced supervisors offer to their less experienced peers is a critical aspect of supervisor development, and held in higher regard by them than institutional 'management' and 'training'. And it is mutually beneficial. Therefore, if the creative arts disciplines are to build supervision capacity and help to ensure quality in postgraduate supervision, such relationships and networks must be recognised, nurtured, and harnessed through the provision of such activities as peer mentoring, peer-to peer dialogues, discipline level workshops involving sharing advice as well as contextualized, discipline specific exemplars of good practice.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching under Grant [LE12:2264]. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

The authors also extend thanks to the project team, who facilitated the interviews, Professor Welby Ings, Associate Professor Barbara Bolt, Professor Ross Harley and Dr Claire Aitchison. We thank Research Assistant Elizabeth Ellison for her management of the mass of material we gathered and the content analysis of the interviews. And we thank the supervisors who generously offered us their insights and so contributed to (and are acknowledged in) the booklet *12 Principles for the Effective Supervision of Creative Practice Higher Research Degrees*.

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[i] There are various names for the written component across the sector: exegesis, thesis, dissertation.

[ii] During this 'transitional' phase, many candidates employed tactics to incorporate practice with their 'full thesis', so helping to pave the way for this new field, a discussion outside the scope of this paper.

[iii] Participation was voluntary, with signed consent. The interview questions were approved by the QUT Human Research Ethics Approval Number 1200000625.

[iv] In 2009 Baker and Buckley argued that differing backgrounds of supervisors had led to supervisors supervising different 'parts' of the PhD (i.e. the exegetical component or the creative component). However, they foresaw a gradual shift to supervisors overseeing the entire thesis, as more supervisors become able to do so. This is borne out in our, more current research. Irrespective of their qualifications, the form of their own PhD, or their identification as a theorist, practitioner, or hybrid theorist-practitioner/practitioner-theorist, almost all (24 of the 25) interview subjects supervise across both creative and written aspects of a candidate's project–an increasing recognition that theory and practice are integral and interdependent.

[v] This represents a substantial shift from earlier discipline-wide studies that found that none had undertaken central training (Hammond, 2010; Dinham & Scot, 1999; and Sinclair, 2004)), and reflects changing quality assurance requirements.

[vi] Except that is, for passive resistance to imperatives of institutional compliance as failure to comply.

[vii] An exception was some of the interviews at QUT, which were conducted by the project's research assistant. The relative merits and disadvantages of an 'insider' research position have been discussed in anthropology and sociology literature, particularly in relation to the allied health professions (Finlay, L., 2006, Marshall et al., 2010).

[viii] One university in the study has recently introduced a tiered accreditation system that recognises levels of experience through titles and recommends that workload be allocated for mentoring new supervisors in a formal arrangement.